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CHAPTER XV.

And for several seconds longer the stillness strangled their spirits in its ruthless grasp. Then of a sudden a cry shrilled through the fog, so near at hand that it seemed scarcely more distant than over the side. "Aho! Help! Aho! Help!" So insistent, so urgent was its accent that, coupled with the surprise, it brought the three as one to their feet, all a-tremble, their eyes seeking one another's faces, then shifting, uneasily away. "What can it be?" Rose whispered, aghast, shrinking into Alan's ready arm. "A woman," Barcus put in harshly. "Judith," the girl moaned. Alan shook himself together. "Impossible!" he contended. "I saw her go down."

There's nothing to go by—except the bare possibility that the reef she spoke of may be Norton's. It doesn't seem possible, but we may have made that much sooth. In that case we're about three miles off the mainland, somewhere in the neighborhood of Katama Island, a little, rocky, desolate bump of earth, inhabited mainly by fishermen. The girl wrung her hands. "But how could Judith get there—and with her men—and ammunition?" "Don't ask me. Going on my experience with the lady, I'd be willing to bet that she was picked up by the steamer that ran us down, and proceeded to make a prize of it—or try to. One thing's certain—she must have found or stolen a boat from somebody; they couldn't have made Norton's reef by swimming—it's too



Yanked Him Off to His Cell.

far. That's the answer; they were picked up, stole a boat, and piled it up on the reef. "And there's no hope!" "Only of the fog relieving. If we could make the mainland and get help." His accents died away into a disconsolate silence that was unbroken for upwards of an hour. So slowly the current bore the lifeboat toward the beach and so still the tide that Barcus never appreciated they were within touch of any land until the bows grounded with a slight jar and a grating sound. With a cry of incredulity he leaped to his feet—"Land, by all that's lucky!"—and stooping, lent a hand to the girl, aiding her to rise. Hardly had Rose had time to comprehend what had happened, when Barcus was over the side and wrestling with the bows, dragging the boat farther upon the shoals. She was, however, more than one man could manage; and when her stem had bitten a little more deeply into the sands, Barcus gave over the attempt, lifting Rose down, set her on dry land, then climbed back into the vessel, rummaged out her anchor and cable, and carried them ashore, planting the former well up towards the foot of the cliff.

CHAPTER XVI.

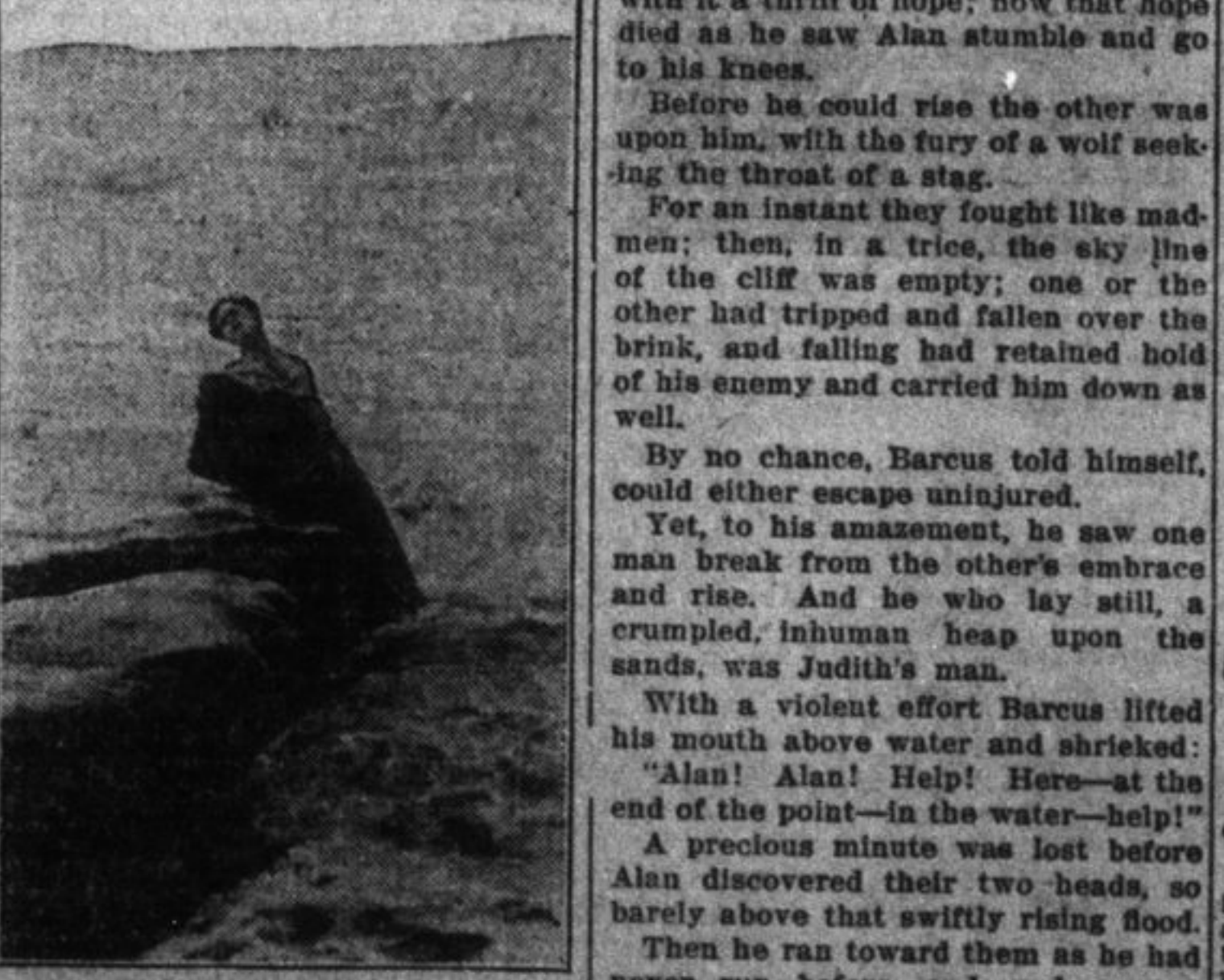
The island. Not more than twenty seconds could have elapsed before Barcus recovered from the shock of the motor's treachery sufficiently to rerease the wheel, throttle down the carburetor and jump out of the engine-pit. But in that small space of time the lifeboat and Alan Law had parted company as definitely as though one of them had been levitated bodily to the far side of the earth. It could not have been more than a minute after the accident before Barcus was guiding the boat over what, going on his sense of location and judgment of distance, he could have sworn was the precise spot where Alan had disappeared, but without discovering a sign of him. And for the next twenty minutes he divided his attention between attempts to soothe and reassure the half-distracted girl and efforts to elude a reply from Alan by stentorian hallooing—with as little success in the one as in the other. "Alan!" he shrieked at the top of his lungs. "Alan! Give a hall to tell us you're safe!" There was a little pause; he was racking his brains for some more moving mode of appeal when the answer came in another voice—in the voice of Judith Trine, clear, musical, effervescent with sardonic humor. "Be at peace, little one—bleat no more! Mr. Law is with us—and safe—oh, quite, quite safe!" In dumb consternation Barcus sought the countenance of Rose. Her eyes, meeting his, were blank with despair. He shook his head helplessly and let his hands dangle idly between his knees. With no way on her, the lifeboat drifted with a current of unknown set and strength. "What can we do?" Rose implored. "We must do something. We can't leave him here. Oh, when I think of him there, in her hands, I could go mad!" "If only I knew," Barcus protested; "but my hands are tied, my wife are as helpless as my eyes are blind.

her she lingered upon the sands, in the mouth of the shelter he had selected for her, staring hungrily out on the shimmering sea, that, now wholly divested of its hood, smiled up at the heavens, whose sapphire face it mirrored, as fair and sweet of seeming as though it had never veiled a heartless tragedy. Slowly it darkened as the sapphire above grew darker, blending insensibly into rare ultramarine with the slow decline of the sun, by whose altitude above the horizon the day had not more than ninety minutes to run. And she thought drowsily that if that sun sank without her learning that her lover lived, it would not rise again upon a world tenanted by Rose Trine. It was not true, she told herself, that people never die of broken hearts. She knew that, were he taken from her, she could no longer live. And sleep overwhelmed her suddenly, like a great, dark cloud. But his dominion over her faculties was not of long duration. Slowly, heavily, mutinously, she was rescued from its trance—came to her senses with an effect of one who emerges from some vast place of blackness and terror, to find Barcus kneeling over and gingerly but persistently shaking her by the shoulder. And then she sat up with a cry of mystified compassion; for in the brief time that he had been absent—it had not been more than an hour—Mr. Barcus had most unquestionably been severely used. He had acquired a long cut over one eye, but shallow, upon which blood had dried, together with a bruised and swollen cheek that was badly scratched to boot. And what simple articles of clothing remained to him, after his strenuous experiences of the last forty-eight hours, had been reduced to even greater simplicity; his shirt, for example, now lacked a sleeve that had been altogether torn away at the shoulder. "No!" he told her, as soon as he saw her wits were awake once more—"don't waste time pitying me. I'm all right—and so is Alan! That's the main thing for you to understand; he's still alive and sound."

But where is he? Take me to him! she demanded, rising with a movement of such grace and vigor that it seemed hard to believe she had ever known an instant's weariness. "That's the rub," Barcus confessed, squatting on the sands and knocking his hair. "I daren't take you to him. Judith might object. Besides, you can see for yourself it isn't safe to mingle with the inhabitants of this tight little island—and you can't get to where Alan is without mingling considerably. Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it, and we'll try to figure out what's best to be done. Maybe we can manage a rescue under cover of night." And when the girl had settled herself beside him he launched into a detailed report. "It's Katama Island, all right," he announced, "but change has come over the place since I visited it some years ago. Then it was a community of simple-hearted villagers and fishermen; now, unless all signs fail, it's a den of smugglers. I noticed a number of Chinese about; and that, taken in connection with the fact that, when I ventured to introduce myself to the village gimill and ask a few innocent questions, the entire population, to a child, landed on me like a thousand brick—the two circumstances made me think we'd stumbled on a settlement of earnest workers at the gentle art of helping poor Chinamen evade the exclusion laws."

With a wry smile, he pursued: "As for me, I landed out back of the joint, on the nape of my neck, and took the count, surrounded by a lot of unsympathetic boxes and barrels that had been better days. And when I came to and started to crawl unostentatiously away, I was just in time to witness the landing of your amiable sister, that gang of cutthroats she keeps on the payroll, and Alan in company with a choice crew of scoundrels as you'd care to see. I gathered from a few words that leaked out of the back door of the barroom, that it was as I had thought—Judith had stolen a boat from the ship that picked her up, and rammed it on Norton's reef; and after she gathered Alan in the chamber of commerce, or something like that. Any way, her lot and the islanders were soon as thick as thieves, and tanking up so sociably that I actually got a chance to whisper a word to Alan and tell him you were all right, and that he'd find us both down here on the beach. If luck served him with an escape. That was all I got a chance to say, for Judith marched up just then and yanked him off to his cell. I mean to say, he's locked up now in a little stone hut on the edge of the cliff, with the door guarded and the window overlooking a sheer drop of thirty feet or so to the beach. When I'd seen that much I calculated it was about time for me to get quit of that neighborhood, before Mam'selle Judith nicked me with the evil eye."

"You don't think she saw you?" the girl cried. "I don't think so," Barcus allowed gravely; and then, lifting his gaze, he added as he rose in a bound: "I just know she did—that's all." In another instant he was hastening night and morn with three willing servants, who had come suddenly into view round a shoulder of rock, but his efforts were short-lived, for the men, who were weakened with suffering and fatigue—and the three were fresh and had the compass at least of their numbers. He was overborne in a twinkling, and had his face ground brutally into the sand while his hands were made fast with stout rope behind his back. And when he rose, it was to find, as he had anticipated, that Rose's resistance had been as futile as his own; she, too, was captive, her hands bound like his, the huge and unclean paw of one of Judith's crew cruelly clamped upon her shoulders. They were granted time to exchange no more than one despairing glance when a curt laugh fairly chilled the blood in Mr. Barcus, and he swung sharply between his two guards to confront Judith Trine. The woman he saw at first glance, was in one of her most dangerous moods—if, Barcus mentally qualified, there was a pin to choose between her moods. But now, beyond dispute, she exhibited a countenance new in his experience, with her, and one well calculated to appal. Her face was bloodless, even as her lips were white with the curb she put upon her passion. Her eyes were lurid with the glare of rage approaching mania. Her hands trembled, her lips quivered, all her actions were abrupt with nervousness. He was by no means poor-spirited, but he shrank openly from the look she gave him, and was relieved when she, with a sneer, passed him by and planted herself squarely before her sister. "Well?" she demanded brusquely. "How much longer do you think I'm going to tolerate your interference—your poor little fool! How many more lessons will you require before realizing that I mean to have my way, and that you'll cross me only to suffer for it?" The courage of the other girl won the unfeigned admiration of Mr. Barcus. Far from cringing, she seemed to find fresh heart in her sister's challenge. Her head was high, her glance level with limitless contempt as she replied: "So you've tried again?" she inquired obliquely, with a tone of pity. "You've offered him your love yet another time, have you?" "Silence!" Judith cried in fury. "Only to learn once more that he would rather die than you?" Rose persisted, unflinching. "And so you come to take your spite out on me, do you? You pitiful thing! Do you think I mind—knowing as I do now that he could never hold you in anything but compassion and contempt?" For an instant there was silence; by the scorn of her sister the heat of Judith's fury had been transformed into a cold and malignant rage. She controlled herself and her voice marvelously. "You will see," she said in even and frigid accents. And the light of her pupils leaped and leaped again in her eyes like a living flame. "I have prepared a way to make you understand what opposition to me means."



Already the Waters Had Risen Over an Inch.

She waved a hand toward the nearer point of rocks. "Take them along," she commanded. The understanding between her and her men was apparently complete; for these last, without hesitation or further instructions, marched Rose and Barcus down to the end of the spit and, on, into the water. It was nearly knee-deep before Barcus was halted with a savage jerk, backed up to a rock, forced despite his frenzied resistance to sit down in the water, and swiftly, with half a dozen deft hitches of rope and a stanch knot, made fast in that position—submerged to his chest. This accomplished, the men turned attention to Rose, lashing her in similar wise at Barcus's side. Standing just above the water-line, with every sign of complete calm and sanity other than that ominous flickering in her eyes, Judith superintended the business till its conclusion, then waved the men away. Quietly, like well-trained servants, they turned their backs and marched off. And again, after a brief wait, the woman laughed her short and mirthless laugh. "The tide will be high," she said, "precisely at sunset. You may time your lives by that. When the sun dips into the sea, then will your lives go down with it." She turned on her heel and strode swiftly away, with not so much as a backward glance, overtook her men, and passed quietly from sight around the farther point of rocks. For some time Barcus struggled vainly with his bonds. As for Rose, she wasted no strength in struggling—perhaps had none to waste. When he looked her way he saw her exquisite profile unmarred by any line of fear or doubt, sharply relieved against the darkness of the rising flood. Her level gaze without a tremor traversed the shining food to its far horizon. He noted that already the waters had risen more than an inch. Humbled even in his terror by that radiant calm that dwelt upon her, he ventured diffidently: "Rose—Miss Trine—" She turned her head and found the heart to smile. "Rose," she corrected gently. "I'm sorry," he said—which was not at all what he had meant to say. "I've done my best. I suppose it's wrong to give up—but they've made it too much for me, this time." "I know," she said gently. "You"—he stammered—"you're not afraid?" "There is nothing to fear," she said, "but death." "Then," he said more bravely, after a time—the water now was near his chin—"good-by—good luck!" "Not yet, dear friend," she returned, "not yet." But the sun was perilously close upon the rim of the world. But a little time, and it would be night. He closed his eyes to shut out the vision of its slow, implacable descent. The water was now almost level with his lips; it seemed strange that

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Delivered into the Hands of the Enemy.

the demon of perversity that tenants them one and all, he knew that the present sweet-tempered performance of the exhibit under consideration was no earnest whatsoever of future good behavior, that when such a complicated contraption was concerned there was never any telling. In view of all of which considerations he presently threw open the battery switch. And the aching void created in the silence by the cessation of that uniform drone was startling enough to rouse even Rose Trine from her state of semi-somnolence. With a look of panic she sat up, thrust damp hair back from her eyes, and nervously inquired: "What's the matter?" "Nothing," Barcus told her. "I shut the engine off—that's all." Tempers were short in that hour, and Alan was annoyed to think that the rest of his beloved should needlessly have been disturbed. "What did you do that for?" he demanded sharply. "Because I jolly well wanted to," Barcus returned in a tone as brusque as, "Oh, you did—eh?" "Yes, I did—eh! I happen to be bossing this end of the boat and to have sense enough to realize there's no sense at all in our wasting fuel the way we are—cruising nowhere!" "Well," Law contended, struck by the fairness of this argument, but unable to calm his uneasiness—"just the same, we might—" "Yes; of course, we might," Barcus snapped. "We might a whole lot. We might, for instance, be heading for Spain, for all you or I know to the contrary. And in such case, I for one respectfully prefer to have gas enough to take us home again if ever this gas—based fog lifts!"